DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 214 570 JC 820 109

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TITLE At What Point Students Left Classes at Minneapolis Community College, Fall Quarter, 1981.
INSTITUTION Minneapolis Community Coll., Minn.
PUB DATE Jan 82
NOTE 10p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Persistence; *Attendance Patterns; Community Colleges; Dropout Research; *Dropouts; Educational Counseling; School Surveys; Two Year Colleges; *Withdrawal (Education)

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Minneapolis Community College to determine the point at which students dropped out of classes during fall quarter 1981 and to consider whether counseling interventions at any particular point during the quarter could reduce student attrition. A sample of 71 classes (20% of the classes offered) was taken, and instructors provided information on 83.1% of the classes in the sample. Students were classified as "no shows" if they never attended class and as "dropouts" if they attended class but later dropped out either officially or unofficially. Study findings included the following: (1) the number of male and female dropouts and no shows were almost equal, although women made up 62% of the student body; (2) no shows and dropouts made up 71% of all "N" (no credit) and "W" (withdrawal) grades; (3) no shows received 42.2% and dropouts received 28.9% of the "N" and "W" grades; (4) of the students who dropped out, 18.1% did so during the 3rd week of the quarter, 21.0% during the 4th week, 10.5% during the 7th week, and 12.4% during the 8th week; and (5) the patterns of student withdrawal varied among the disciplines, with students in science and mathematics courses tending to drop out later in the quarter than students in social science and humanities courses. Based on the findings, it was recommended that instructors refer no shows and students in academic difficulty to counselors and that courses be held during the 5th week break to keep students in the habit of attending. (HB)

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AT WHAT POINT STUDENTS LEFT CLASSES AT MINNEAPOLIS COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Fall Quarter, 1981

By: June B. Stein, College Research Officer

January 1982

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JC 820 109

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As all faculty members know, college classes usually have more students in class at the beginning of a quarter than at the end. But when during a quarter do students drop out? This inquiry was the subject of study during the fall quarter 1981 at Minneapolis Community College. One reason for wanting to know when students drop out was to consider whether counseling intervention could be effective at some point to reduce such attrition.

The subject was investigated in the following way. In the class schedule for fall 1981, beginning with the second entry, every fifth class was circled to form a twenty percent sample of classes held. In this way, 71 classes were selected as the sample. College for Working Adults classes were excluded from the sample because of their very different teaching format. In the ninth and tenth weeks of the quarter, the research officer personally interviewed about 40 percent of the instructors of classes in the sample to learn the total number of students registered in each class, the number of students who never came to any class session of the specific course and section in the sample, "no shows", and then to learn when students who dropped out, officially or unofficially, did so. Of course, few instructors kept attendance records. Almost all, however, were able to say from test records in their grade books or from personal knowledge approximately when students had dropped out. Also, instructors were aware of the students on their class lists who had never come to a class session. These data were tallied by sex. Instructors who were not personally contacted were sent a form to fill out requesting the same information (see appendix for a copy).

After the end of fall quarter, official grade sheets for the classes in the sample were examined and the final class registration and numbers of "N" (no credit) and "W" (withdrawn) grades given were recorded. Of interest here was the proportion no shows and drop outs were of all the "N" and "W" grades given. Of the 71 classes in the study, two (2.8 percent) had been cancelled for insufficient enrollment and a final grade list was not available for one class. A lecture class was accepted instead of the lab section that was in the sample because the data available were for the lecture class. Eight instructors of nine of the classes sampled (12.7 percent of the classes) did not respond to the request for information. They taught six humanities courses, two social science and one law enforcement classes. An additional instructor had no information available. Data were available for 83.1 percent of the classes in the sample and are tabled within academic groupings in the tables attached.

Table I gives by academic group the number and sex of students who never attended classes and who dropped out of class. To help evaluate the data on sex, note that 62 percent of Minneapolis Community College's student body in fall 1981 were women. Yet, as Table I shows, more men were no shows in most of the academic groups except in physical education and health and business, Chemical Dependency Specialist (CDS) and Nursing programs. With respect to drop outs, more women than men left English, Phys. Ed., and health, CDS, and human services classes.

Table I also gives the numbers of students registered on the final class lists and the number of "N" and "W" grades on those lists. Since students may have been registered in more than one discipline or, possibly, for two or more classes in the same discipline, the total number of registrations was 1526, which probably represents about 500 unduplicated students. The "N" and "W" grades for this group were 24.0 percent of the grades given.

In the final three columns of Table I, data by academic group are given. Shown are the proportion that no shows, drop outs, and the total of the two were of the total number of "N" and "W" grades given. In a few cases the proportions are over 100 percent. These proportions reflect registration problems in a number of the classes where students got into the wrong classes or sections and the instructors reported them as no shows or drop outs from their 10th day class lists. The final class lists as corrected contained smaller numbers of students. The proportion of no shows varied among academic groups from 34.0 percent (Math/Sci.) to 66.7 percent in human services classes, but averaged 42.2 percent over all disciplines. Among all academic groups, the students who never attended class made up a larger proportion of the final "N" and "W" grades given than did the drop outs except in science/Math, 34.0 vs. 41.5 percent, respectively, and CDS, 61.1 vs. 66.7 percent, respectively. Proportions of drop outs averaged from none in nursing to 66.7 percent in CDS and averaged over all groups 28.9 percent of all "N"/"W" grades given. These two sources of "N" or "W" grades together made up 71.1 percent of all "N" and "W" grades given.

Table II shows when the students dropped out of class by week. Weeks are numbered 1-12, although no classes were held during the fifth week. Of the drop outs, over a fifth, 21.0 percent, left during or at the end of the fourth week of class. In this week the largest numbers of students dropped out. If the fifth week of the quarter when no classes were held is added, 26.7 percent, over a fourth of the drops, occurred in this period. The next heaviest periods of drop out were the third week, 18.1 percent; the eighth week, 12.4 percent; and the seventh week, 10.5 percent. In the first two weeks of class, 14.3 percent of drop outs left. Few drops occurred in or after the ninth week. Thus the heaviest drop out period occurred at the time of the break in classes caused by the faculty association meetings and Columbus Day holiday and the midquarter examination period.

Table III presents no show and drop out data by week of drop and academic group. The pattern of drops did vary among disciplines. Heaviest drop for science and mathematics classes was at midquarter time followed by the two weeks before the Columbus Day break. In social science and business, most students who dropped did so before Columbus Day, true also in humanities classes. In English some drops occurred throughout the quarter but the mid-quarter period was heaviest. CDS lost most students the first and third week while Phys. Ed./health and human services lost students both in the second and third weeks and the last few weeks of the quarter.

Counseling intervention to reduce attrition could take a number of forms. Student self referral to counselors, of course, is one. In most cases, however, the instructors would need to initiate the counseling process because they are the ones who know that the student is in academic difficulty and/or not coming to class. In the case of students who never appear in class, instructors could send a list to the counseling division by the secound week of the quarter where, if staffing were sufficient, the student could be contacted to see if the lack of attendance reflected a problem amenable to counseling or remedy within the college. Drop outs during the quarter might be helped by faculty referring students for tutoring and/or counseling, a process already taking place. The problem of attrition due to having no classes in the fifth week of the quarter presents a different kind of problem. A couple of instructors felt that their poorer students just stayed home after the week of no classes. Whether it would be advisable to hold class on two days of that week to keep students in the habit of attending class could be explored further.

Summary

A twenty percent sample of fall quarter 1981 classes was used to investigate when students dropped out of classes. Instructors made data available for 83.1 percent of the classes in the sample. Numbers of drop outs and students who never attended class (no shows) were compared by academic group with final "N" and "W" grades given at the end of the quarter. Results were as follows.

In most academic groups more men than women were no shows although 62 percent of the student body were women fall quarter. Exceptions were in physical education and health, business, chemical dependancy (CDS), and nursing. Also, more men than women dropped out of class except in English, Phys. Ed./ health, CDS, and human services.

For the college sample as a whole, no shows and drop outs made up 71.1 percent of all "N" and "W" grades given at the end of the quarter. No shows were 42.2 percent of all "N"/"W" grades and drop outs were 28.9 percent of them. Among academic groups, no shows were a higher proportion than drop outs except in the Science/Math, and CDS groups. Obviously, the chief reasons for getting "N" or "W" grades were due to either never attending class or dropping out during the quarter.

The largest number of students who dropped out did so in the fourth or fifth week of the quarter, 26.7 percent of all drop outs. No classes were held the fifth week when Columbus Day and faculty association meetings took place. The next heaviest periods for dropping out of class were the third week with 18.1 percent; the eighth week, 12.4 percent; and the seventh week, 10.5 percent. Thus the heaviest drop out occurred about the time of the week of no classes and midquarter time. Different academic groups had different drop out patterns.

Intervention strategies for dealing with the problem were discussed briefly.

Table I

No Show and Drop Out Tallies by Academic Group as a Percent of N/W Final Grades Using the Average Percents of Each Class Percent

Academic Group*	N. Classes	No Shows Wom.	Men	Tot.	Drop Outs Wom.	Men	Tot.	Final Class List Tot. Reg.	N/W Grades	No Show** % N/W	Drops** % N/W	NS + Drops** % N/W
English	9	9	15	24	9	8	17	199	62	38.7	27.4	66.1
Social Science	6	11	13	24	3	4	7	326	57	42.1	12.3	54.4
Humanities	7	10	13	23	3	4	7	185	56	41.1	12.5	53.6
Science/Math	12	12	20	32	18	21	39	284	94	34.0	41.5	75.5
Phys. Ed./Hlth.	6	13	2	15	6	4	10	133	35	42.9	28.6	71.4
Business	3	10	6	16	3	5	8	105	29	55.2	27.6	82.8
Chem. Dep. Sp.	7	9	2	11	8	4	12	143	18	61.1	66.7	127.8
Human Serv.	3	2	4	6	4	1	5	48	9	66.7	55.6	122.2
Nursing	4	1	1				0	39	2	50.0	.0	50.0
Misc.	2	1	2	3		1	1	64	5	60.0	20.0	80.0
	%											
Totals	59 83.1			155			106	1526	367	42.2	28.9	71.1
No information	12 16.9								%			
Grand Total	71 100.0								24.0			

* English includes 1 Journalism class
Social Science includes 1 Soc. Sci., 2 Psy., 1 Soc., 1 Econ., 1 History
No information for 1 Psy., 1 Am. Ind. Studies Classes
Humanities includes 2 Hum., 1 Cine, 1 Mus., 1 French, 1 Int. Disc., 1 Speech
No information for 1 Art, 1 Th. Art., 3 Mus., 1 Phot. Classes.
1 Art Cancelled
Science/Math includes 6 Math., 1 CSci., 2 Biol., 2 Chem., 1 Phys.
Phys. Ed/Hlth includes 5 Phys. Ed., 1 Health
Human Services - 1 class cancelled, 1 final grades missing
Misc. includes 1 CBE, 1 COR
No information for 1 Law Enf. Class

** Average percent of the total academic group.

Table II
Drop Outs During Fall Quarter 1981

1981	Women	Men	Totals N	%	Cum. %
1. Sept. 15-18	6	1	7	6.7	6.7
2. 21-25	5	3	8	7.6	14.3
3. 28-Oct. 2	11	8	19	18.1	32.4
4. Oct. 5- 9	8	14	22	21.0	53.4
no classes					
5. 12-16	4	2	6	5.7	59.1
6. 19-23	4	4	8	7.6	66.7
7. 26-30	4	7	11	10.5	77.2
8. Nov. 2-6	4	9	13	12.4	89.6
9. 9-13	1	1	2	1.9	91.5
10. 16-20	4		4	3.8	95.3
11. 23-27	1	3	4	3.8	99.1
12. Nov. 30-Dec. 4	1		1	1.0	100.1
Totals	53	52	105	100.1	

Table III

No Shows and Drop Outs by Academic Group and Week of Class

	Academic Group and Number of Student No Shows and Drop Outs									
Week	Eng.	Soc. Sci.	Hum.	Sci. Math.	Phy.Ed. Hlth.	Bus.	C.Dep.	Hum. Serv.	Nsg.	Misc.
0	24	24	23	32	15	16	11	6	1	3
1.	1			1			5			
2.	1		1		4		1	1		
3.	4			6	2	1	3	2		1
4.	1	6	3	6		6				
No Class										
5.		1	2	1			2			
6.	1		1	5		1				
7.	3			8						
8.	3			8	1		1			
9.				1	1					
10.	1			1	2					
11.	1			1				2		
12.				1						
Total N. No Shows	24	24	23	32	15	16	11	6	1	3
Total N. Drops	16	7	7	39	10	8	12	5	0	1
Number of Classes	9	6	7	12	6	3	7	3	4	2

STATE OF MINNESOTA

DEPARTMENT_____

Office Memorandum

TO :

DATE: 11/12/81

Appendix

FROM : June Stein, College Research Officer

SUBJECT: Research on When Students Drop Out of Class

I have been asked to investigate when students drop out of class during a quarter. To do this, I have drawn a 20 percent sample of fall 1981 classes and would like to know the answers to three questions about each class. Your class below was in this sample. Would you please fill out the form below and return it to me in C-214. If you have any questions about this project, feel free to call me on ext. 7047.

Course _____

1. Total number in the class given on your class list: _____.
2. Any no shows - students on the class list who never attended class:

   no. women _____

   no. men _____
3. Students who dropped out officially or unofficially:

No. Men	When They Dropped

No. Women

I do appreciate your cooperation.

JS:rs

ERIC Clearinghouse for Junior Colleges
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University of California
Los Angeles, California 90024

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